

# BOOK OF THE MONTH

## **LIFE SENTENCE Mark Hodgkinson (The Parrs Wood Press, £8.95)**



A happy spin off of the boom in football publishing is that it has brought many excellent writers to the fore who might otherwise have remained in obscurity. Of these, surely

none is more talented than Mark Hodgkinson — the Michael Owen of the football literati. Hodgkinson was already a familiar name in the world of music journalism and had written biographies of, among others, Marianne Faithful and the Wedding Present, so he was hardly destined for a life in the margins.

However, since his work was first brought to the attention of *Times* readers, a whole new group of devotees have been able to revel in his glorious word portraits of the game, the people who follow it and those who make their living from it. After *Life at the Top*, an account of Barnsley's season in the Premiership, and *Blue Moon*, which followed Manchester City in the second division, Hodgkinson returns to his own backyard with *Life Sentence*. The book examines his lifelong obsession with Rochdale and vividly describes how his support has coloured his life, work and relationships. Do not be tempted to file this alongside the various sub-*Fever Pitch* books that have appeared since Nick Hornby's watershed work was first published: like that book, this belongs in a class of its own.

**RICHARD WHITEHEAD**